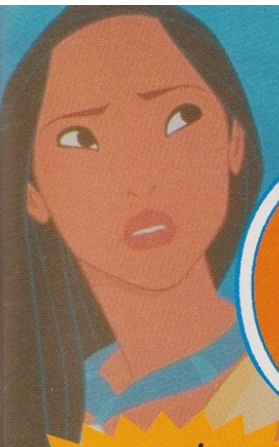

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FOREVER MAN

There's a new Batman on the big screen. Screenwriter Akiva Goldsman helped get him there.

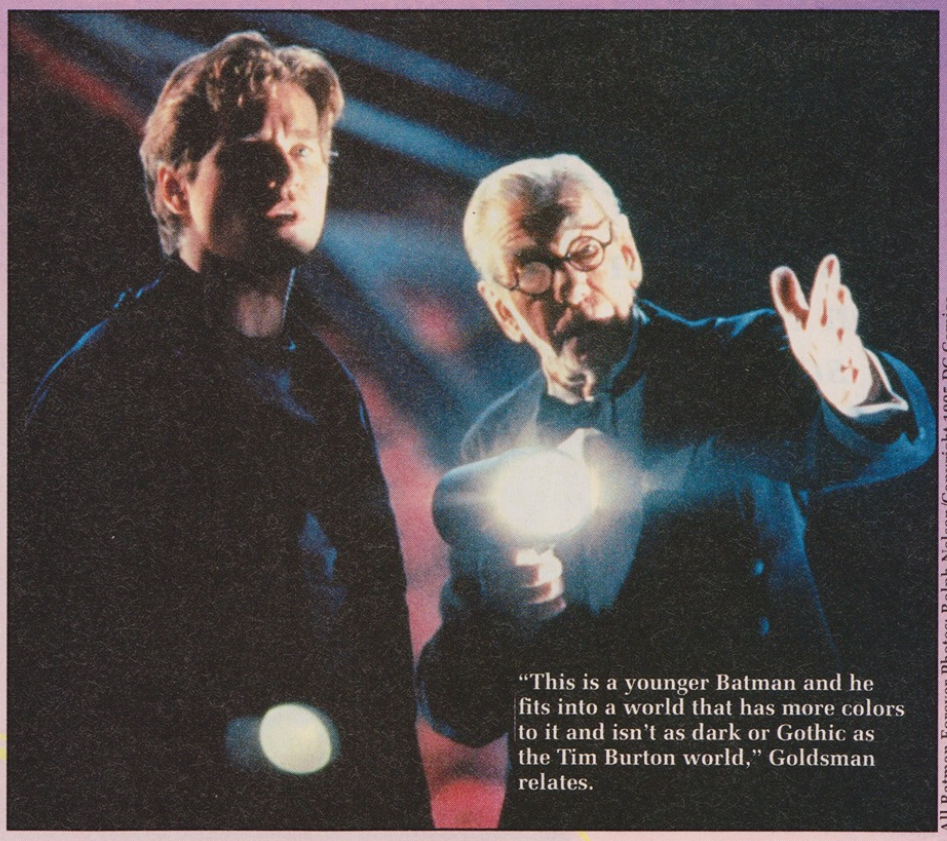
By MARC SHAPIRO

When the original *Batman* movie came out, Akiva Goldsman was not yet a screenwriter. He did not even have a nodding acquaintance with the business. But he was a Batman fan of major proportions. "If somebody had come up to me at that point and said, 'One of these days, you could write one of these movies,' I probably would have laughed or cried," speculates the *Batman Forever* scripter. "When I look up from my computer these days and look at the picture of Batman and Robin, signed by Bob Kane, which says 'Good script,' I think, 'How did I get *this* lucky?' "

Goldsman, it seems, just keeps getting luckier. Following the success of his second script, the adaptation of John Grisham's *The Client*, and the anticipation for *Batman Forever*, Goldsman, as writer/producer, has won the task of bringing *Lost in Space* to the big screen. In the face of the inevitable spotlight being focused on him, he's trying to remain humble.

"Because I'm the latest writer on *Batman Forever*, I get the notion from people that I am the author of the script, but I'm *not*. A script for a film of this size is utterly collaborative. Many people have been involved. What I am is a member of a creative team. Lee and Janet Scott Batchler had worked with Joel [director Schumacher] to develop some of the original concepts for the movie," explains Goldsman, "but because of some contractual obligations, they had to move on to another studio and another project. I had worked with Joel on

Oscar-winner Tommy Lee Jones takes over the role that didn't make Billy Dee Williams famous—former District Attorney Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Two-Face.



"This is a younger Batman and he fits into a world that has more colors to it and isn't as dark or Gothic as the Tim Burton world," Goldsman relates.

All Batman Forever Photos: Ralph Nelson/Copyright 1995 DC Comics
All Batman Forever Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros.

The Client and he was kind enough to call me. I've been a huge Batman fan since I was a little kid, so being asked to script this movie was a slam dunk for me."

The writer officially came on board the project in spring '94 and immediately immersed himself in the Dark Knight mythos—specifically, the comics ("I love Frank Miller's stuff"), the animated TV series ("It looked real edgy and dark") and, to a lesser extent, the '60s television show. Goldsman also returned to the previous two Batman movies and had his initial impressions of those films reinforced.

"I loved the first movie," he says. "People have said there were plot problems and I suppose, in hindsight, there were probably things that could have been done differently. But I thought it was an honest updating of the Frank Miller 'Dark Knight' myth and a spectacular piece of filmmaking. The second film erred on the side of darkness. I was a little bit too spooked by the Penguin. The way the film held together was a little too dark for me."

Batman Forever begins with the escape from Arkham Asylum of former District Attorney Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Two-Face. Half of Dent's face was scarred by acid, leaving him a demented criminal. Now he's plotting a major crime spree in Gotham City as well as revenge against Batman, whom he blames for his deformity. The film flashes to the Wayne Institute, where super tech-head and Bruce Wayne admirer Edward Nygma is about to present a plan to his boss for a device that generates interactive holograms for television-type entertainment.

Life has a way of throwing those odd curveballs. Not six years ago, Akiva Goldsman was a face in the crowd. Now, he's the writer behind *Batman Forever*.

Unfortunately, since the device also has a dangerous mind manipulation side effect, Bruce puts an end to the project. Nygma snaps, eventually transforming from mild-mannered nerd to the demented, capering Riddler. The Riddler's out to get Bruce Wayne and Two-Face harbors a vendetta against Batman, so it's not long before the two villains team up.

Adding further complications into the mix is Dr. Chase Meridian, a new love interest for Bruce Wayne with her own set of hangups, and an orphan named Dick Grayson who begins the rocky road to becoming Robin.

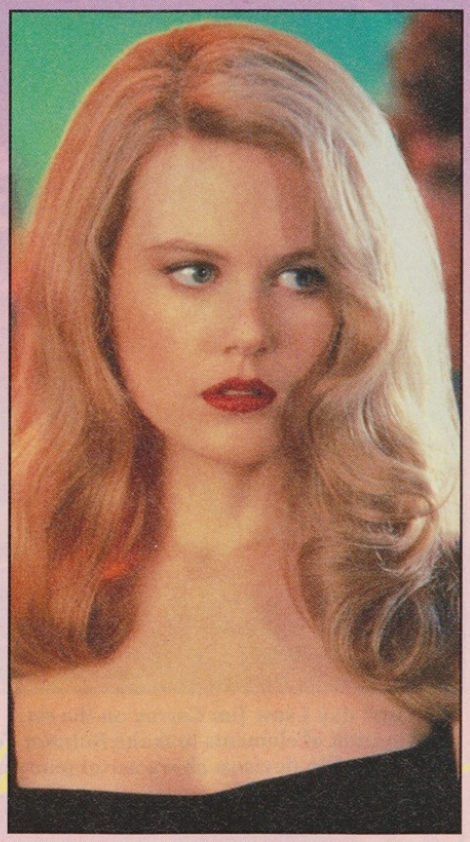
Val (*Willow*) Kilmer, of course, has succeeded Michael Keaton as the Dark Knight. Jim (*The Mask*) Carrey is the Riddler, and Tommy Lee (*The Fugitive*) Jones is Two-Face. Chris (*The Three Musketeers*) O'Donnell dons the mantle of Robin, while Nicole (*Malice*) Kidman takes on the role of Dr. Chase Meridian. Returning from the previous Bat-films are Michael Gough (STARLOG #215) as Alfred and Pat Hingle as Commissioner James Gordon (STARLOG #216). The *Batman Forever* cast also includes Drew Barrymore, Debi Mazar, Rene Auberjonois, Ed Begley Jr. and Don "The Dragon" Wilson.

Directing chores on *Batman Forever* have been passed to *Flatliners*' Schumacher. Handling the producing duties are Tim Burton and Peter MacGregor-Scott. Executive producers are Benjamin Melniker and Michael E. Uslan .

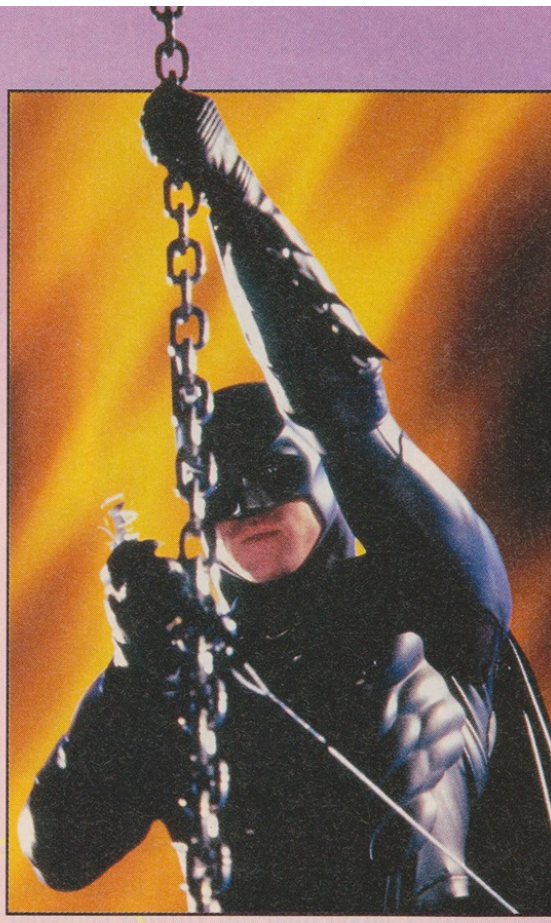
Other key creative personnel are special FX supervisor John Dykstra, art director Barbara Ling, cinematographer Stephen Goldblatt and costume designers Bob Ringwood and Ingrid Farren. Elliot Goldenthal has written the score.

Goldsman ticks off "three formal

Goldsman and director Joel Schumacher decided to go with a not-so-boyish wonder and cast the manly Chris O'Donnell as Dick Grayson.



"The Batman movies have always been about duality and, in that sense, Dr. Chase Meridian fits right in," says Goldsman of Nicole Kidman's character.

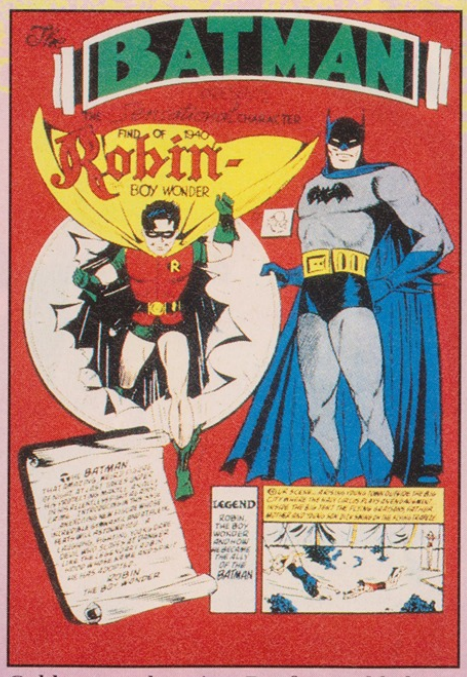


Goldsman was not the only writer to breathe life into Val Kilmer's maiden voyage as the Dark Knight. Lee & Janet Scott Batchler were the original scribes.

drafts of the script and a whole lot of colored pages" as his contribution to the cause. "Things changed for many reasons as the project came closer and closer to happening," offers the writer. "We stared at it more and more closely and began to understand what things worked in the script and what things didn't. The concept of the movie, which is really Joel's, stayed the same all the way through, as did the principal players. But what those characters do and how they do it changed pretty much with each draft."

Several of the most thought-out changes were in the characters of Batman and Bruce Wayne. "The one thing we took very seriously was how to breathe new life into Batman. Tim Burton did what he did beautifully, but we're doing another Batman. Val Kilmer is playing him, *not* Michael Keaton. This is a younger Batman and he fits into a world that has more colors to it and isn't as dark and Gothic as the Tim Burton world. Val is incredibly charming, handsome and very physical, so we've made him very believable in all contexts of this film. Whether he's Batman doing action sequences or being the most charming guy in Gotham City as Bruce Wayne, it will all ring true."

While Goldsman concedes that *Batman Forever* is "a much funnier and more playful movie than the previous two films," he warns fans that the twisted side of Batman will not be ignored. "Bruce Wayne's motivations will be explored in the serious way that you would explore the motivations of anybody who has aberrant behavior. Bruce Wayne is somebody who has had a profound trauma, and this trauma has resulted in a kind of acting out as Batman. He knows what it's like to have a life ruled by revenge. With this film, we go back and revisit his origin and come to a new and different understanding of *why* Bruce Wayne became Batman."



Goldsman, a longtime Bat-fan, tackled a character that was first introduced in 1940, but has yet to make it into the '90s—Robin, the Boy Wonder.

In adding Robin/Dick Grayson, Goldsman worked to form an emotional bond between the Dark Knight and his new partner. "We've revised the thematic notions of Robin's origin to the degree that Batman is present when Dick Grayson's parents and brother are killed, so he sees an echo of his own origin. We've changed the Batman-Robin relationship in the sense that, in the comics, there was an eager acceptance of the partnership between the two. What their relationship in this film will say is that the last thing we want somebody to go through is what we already went through. Bruce knows what it's like to put on the cape and cowl every day and go out and get the crap kicked out of him, and a big part of him doesn't want Dick Grayson to go through that. But he does, and so an uneasy kind of partnership is formed."

Adding to this uneasy alliance is the way Grayson has been characterized by Goldsman. "Robin has a remarkable edge to him in this movie. He's much tougher than the Robin in the comic books. He's older and has basically been a gypsy all his life, and so he does not automatically buy into the aristocratic world of Bruce Wayne."

Photo: Copyright 1966 Greenway Productions & 20th Century Fox

Goldsman feels that Jim Carrey's performance as the Riddler is an homage to Frank Gorshin, the 1960s Riddler.

All Art: Copyright 1995 DC Comics

"The first day I saw Jim Carrey on the set, I knew we had nailed the right combination of elements to make *Batman Forever* work," raves Goldsman, who wanted to devise a character of many colors.

The writer's approach to devising truly larger-than-life villains centered on the reality of the Dark Knight's world. "The thing about a Batman movie is that everybody has to be really smart. The Batman world is a very hyperbolic place in terms of action and intellect. Anybody who wants to do something in Batman Land can imagine the technology sufficient to create it. Batman is a normal human being and yet he has created all these remarkable devices. For the Riddler to be a worthy adversary, he had to start out being nearly as smart as Bruce Wayne and then get even smarter. I tried, very simply, to make him as clever as anyone could imagine. It doesn't hurt, when you're attempting to show off a character as having many colors, that you have Jim Carrey in the role."

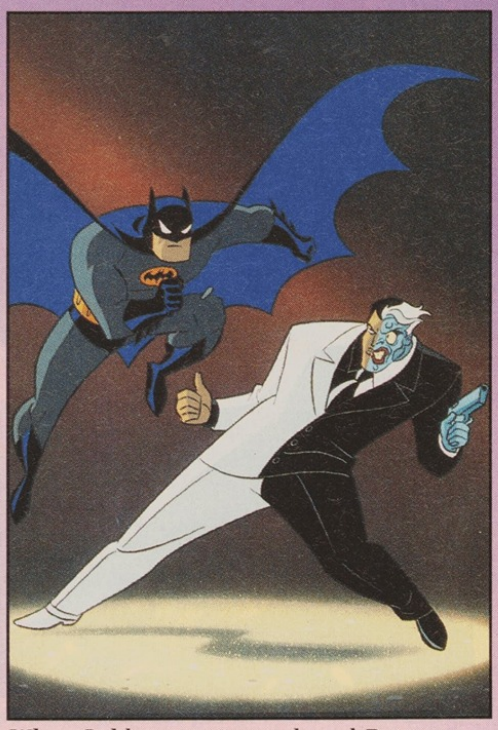
To Goldsman, the Riddler's partner, Two-Face, is the flip side of the villainous coin, so to speak. "The Riddler is the lilting darkness. Two-Face is the sinister darkness. The Riddler conceptualizes the crime and Two-Face implements the crime. Two-Face is your basic monster. He's stronger, darker, scarier and tougher."

While the introduction of Dr. Chase Meridian may be perceived by many as just another love interest, Goldsman claims that his creation belongs to the often twisted world of Batman. "The Batman movies have always been about duality and, in that sense, Dr. Meridian fits right in. She's a specialist in abnormal psychology and is very prim and proper on the surface. But she's also aware of her somewhat twisted attraction to

What are little criminals made of? Sugar and Spice (Drew Barrymore and Debi Mazar) and a whole lotta vice, of course!

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

"We've revised the thematic notions of Robin's origin to the degree that Batman is present when [the Flying Graysons] are killed," the writer offers.



When Goldsman came on board *Batman Forever*, he immersed himself in Bat-lore, including the animated series. "It looked real edgy and dark," he says.

people who are different and so, in her own way, she's also a split personality. We have a situation where she is alternately attracted to Bruce Wayne and to Batman, while not knowing that they are the same person."

Goldsman returns to the notion of the *Batman Forever* script as a collaborative process. "This script was difficult in two major areas. One was projecting honest emotion in the characters and still staying within the film's tone as an alternate reality. The other tough thing was to create new and different things for a comic-book hero in a world where we've already seen everything.

"I had no contact with Tim Burton, but Joel and I talked a lot and, between the two of us, we were able to imagine ourselves into any emotional situation and just make up what we felt these characters *might* feel. When it came to creating the physical action of the script, John Dykstra was a lot of help. He suggested what might or might not work in a particular scene and how the actors and FX could be coordinated for the best possible effect. It was essentially Joel's concept, but he was very good about releasing me as the writer and letting me come up with what I thought was the best version of his ideas."

of mine when I was a kid," he explains. "When other kids in our neighborhood were playing cops and robbers, one friend of mine and I would be running around my house playing John Robinson and Don West."

He hasn't yet begun writing the script, but Goldsman is already certain of one thing. "No, it will *not* be camp like the TV series. The model will be

Why bother with the Caped Suspender and the Boy Blunder when you can give Chase Meridian a piece of your mind?

Goldsman's very first script, *Indian Summer*, later retitled *Silent Fall*, was made and released last year. Still, despite having three produced screenplays, he's reluctant to talk about anything except *Batman Forever*. With a little prodding, he agrees to divulge some facts about the development of *Lost in Space*.

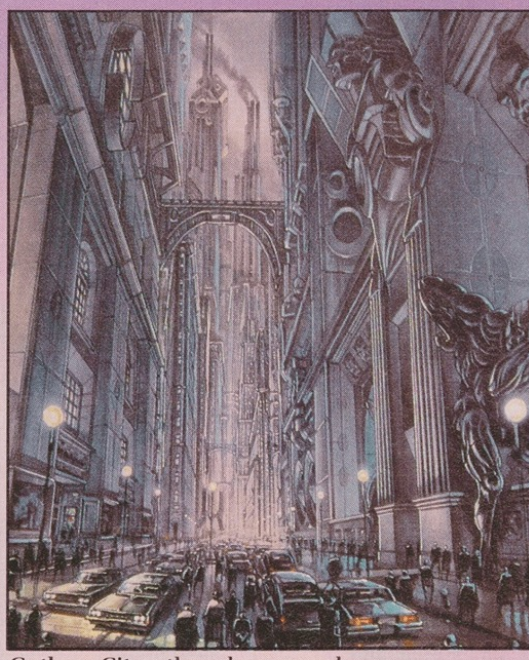
"*Lost in Space* was a favorite show

Goldsman's childhood infatuation became reality about eight months ago when two of his good friends at New Line Cinema, executives Michael DeLuca and Richard Saperstein, contacted him with an offer he couldn't refuse. "They told me the film rights to *Lost in Space* were available and they asked me if I wanted them to buy them. I said, 'Yeah, let's do it.' "

Star Wars, a real science fiction action-adventure thing. The movie will have the same characters but not necessarily the same character types. At least part of the script will be the origin story, because we do have to get the *Jupiter 2* off the launch pad."

Goldsman was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, the son of what he jokingly describes as "a long field of

"The Riddler is the lilting darkness. Two-Face is the sinister darkness. The Riddler conceptualizes the crime and Two-Face implements the crime."



Gotham City—there has never been a more wretched hive of scum and villainy. It takes a hard man to keep it clean, and that man is Batman.

psychologists." Consequently, Goldsman gravitated toward that line of work and, well into his late 20s, worked as a mental health consultant helping schizoid and autistic children.

"I was having a fine time doing what I was doing but, one day, I was giving a lecture and I looked out into the audience and I thought, 'My God! I've become my mother.' Don't get me wrong, I love my mother, but I didn't want to be like her. So, I cashed everything in and wrote a script. It was a script that got me a lot of attention and I was very lucky that people were willing to meet with me. One thing led to another and I ended up working as a uncredited Mr. Fix-It on a number of productions that I'm not allowed to talk about. Then, *The Client* came along and now *Batman Forever*."

While it's a foregone conclusion that, three movies into the series, *Batman Forever* won't be the compendium of camp that the television series was, Goldsman uses the recent pronouncement that Jim Carrey's performance would be an homage to Frank Gorshin, the '60s TV Riddler, as a jumping-off point to defend the film's dramatic integrity.

"The television series was great fun, but it was high camp and this is *not* high camp. Batman has always been kind of a succession of traditions, and the myths surrounding the character have changed form all the way down the line. There are certain things in this movie that will produce a wry smile on audiences' faces. But this is definitely *not* the television series.

"But the first day I saw Jim Carrey on the set, I knew we had nailed the right combination of elements to make *Batman Forever* work. He was out there on the set doing his Riddler thing and he was so unbelievably hilarious and unbelievably spooky that I felt, 'My God! We have the real Riddler.' And there was the day I was out at the Dome in Long Beach and I saw the full-sized Batcave. Few things in my life were as thrilling for me as that day was."

Given his enthusiasm for *Batman Forever*, one might assume he would jump at the chance to script yet another Batman film. Akiva Goldsman's response is optimistic yet guarded. "Some other ideas are already being discussed, but I don't know what the future will bring," he explains. "All I can say is that there are still a lot of good Batman villains out there."

CS

"Bruce knows what it's like to put on the cape and cowl every day and get the crap kicked out of him," reveals Goldsman.